

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. A method of funneling user responses in a voice portal system to determine a desired item or service, the method comprising:

(a) establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service; and

5 (b) determining if the attribute value satisfies an end state, wherein if the end state is not satisfied, performing steps (a) and (b) with a new particular attribute.

10 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service comprises assigning a user preference to the attribute value.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service comprises:  
 15 establishing an attribute vocabulary set related to a particular attribute of a desired item or service;  
 querying a user for an attribute value associated with the particular attribute, the attribute value being a member of the attribute vocabulary set; and  
 identifying the attribute value given by the user.

20 4. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of establishing an attribute vocabulary set comprises providing a group of possible verbal responses to a query on an attribute of a desired item or service.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of identifying the attribute value given by the user comprises providing fallback queries to query the user further for an attribute value which is in the attribute vocabulary set.

25 6. The method of claim 5, wherein the step of providing fallback queries comprises asking the user for at least one substitute attributes for the particular attribute of a desired item or service.

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7. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of identifying the attribute comprises setting a preference for the attribute.

8. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of identifying the attribute comprises setting a global preference for the attribute, the global preference being applied to attributes in a plurality of domains of interest.

9. A system for funneling voice portal user responses to determine a desired item or service, the system comprising:

a user interface; and

a database coupled to the user interface, the user interface

coordinating communications with a user, the database storing information regarding attributes, attribute vocabulary sets, and Internet-based information;

whereby the user interface establishes an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service and determines if the attribute value identified satisfies an end state.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the user interface assigns a user preference to the attribute value.

11. The system of claim 9, wherein the user interface establishes an attribute vocabulary set related to a particular attribute of a desired item or service, queries the user for an attribute value associated with the particular attribute, and identifies the attribute value given by the user.

12. The system of claim 9, wherein the database stores preferences of the user.

13. The system of claim 9, further comprising a customer management subsystem configured to store user related information.

14. The system of claim 13, wherein the customer management subsystem records user responses to queries from the user interface.

15. The system of claim 9, wherein the user interface communicates with a user using voice.

16. The system of claim 9, wherein the user interface utilizes a wireless application protocol (WAP) platform.

Sub 5  
A 17. A voice portal configured to funnel user responses to determine a desired item or service, the voice portal comprising:  
means for establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service; and  
means for determining if the attribute value satisfies an end state.

10 18. The voice portal of claim 17, wherein the means for establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service comprises:

means for establishing an attribute vocabulary set related to a particular attribute of a desired item or service;

15 means for querying a user for an attribute value associated with the particular attribute, the attribute value being a member of the attribute vocabulary set; and

means for identifying the attribute value given by the user.

19. The voice portal of claim 17, wherein the means for establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service comprises means for assigning a user preference to the attribute value.

20. The voice portal of claim 17, further comprising means for setting a user preference.

21. The voice portal of claim 17, further comprising means for recording user responses.

22. The voice portal of claim 17, wherein the means for identifying the attribute value given by the user comprises means for providing fallback queries to ask more questions regarding the attribute.

Sub B3  
50 23. A computer program product comprising computer readable program code for identifying user inputs to a voice portal system, the program code in the computer program product comprising:

first computer readable program code for establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service; and

10 second computer readable program code for determining if the attribute satisfies an end state, whereby the end state signifies the identification of a user-desired item or service.

24. The computer program code of claim 23, wherein the program code for establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service comprises third computer program code for assigning a user  
15 preference to the attribute value.

25. The computer program code of claim 23, wherein the program code for establishing an attribute value associated with a particular attribute of a desired item or service comprises:

20 third computer program product for establishing a vocabulary set;

fourth computer readable program code for receiving voice input from a user; and

fifth computer readable program code for recognizing the voice input from the user, the recognized voice input being an identified attribute.

26. The computer program code of claim 25, wherein the computer  
25 readable program code for establishing a vocabulary set comprises computer readable program code for creating a list of words based on an attribute.

27. The computer program code of claim 23, further comprising computer readable program code for defining a user preference based on user responses.

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